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For Immediate Release

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**American Century Theater presents Kurt Vonnegut's
Happy Birthday, Wanda June March 7 through 29**

When satiric novelist Kurt Vonnegut's first play opened off-Broadway in October of 1970, Newsweek's theater critic Jack Kroll wrote, "Almost every time an American novelist writes a play, he shows up most of our thumb-tongued playwrights... And the same thing must be said of the writing in *Happy Birthday, Wanda June*... Vonnegut's dialogue is not only fast and funny, with a palpable taste and crackle, but it also *means* something. And his comic sense is a superior one: *Wanda June* has as many laughs as anything by Neil Simon. But a New York City newspaper strike cut short what was going to be a long run, and *Wanda June* was soon eclipsed by Vonnegut's many celebrated and best-selling novels, such as *Slaughterhouse Five*, *Breakfast of Champions*, and *God Bless You, Mr. Rosewater*. Still, the play's few revivals have all left audiences laughing *and* thinking. Vonnegut died in 2007, and it is the perfect time to bring his first and perhaps his best play back to the stage. *Happy Birthday, Wanda June* will open at Gunston Theater Two on March 7, and will run through March 29.

The production will be available for viewing by the press and other media on Saturday evening, March 8, at 8 PM, and on Sunday March 9, at 2:30 PM.

Like all of Vonnegut's works, *Happy Birthday, Wanda June* has multiple goals, the first of which is to entertain. But the play is also a satiric attack on the Hemingway hero and American machismo, as big game hunter Harold Ryan returns home from his own wars to find his wife Penelope fending off a variety of odd-ball suitors, just like her counterpart in Homer's *Odyssey*. The plot is too antic to summarize; let us just say that it involves Viet Nam, the bombing of Nagasaki, Heaven, a little girl killed by an ice-cream truck, and her friend the Nazi who is critical of Jesus' shuffleboard skills. TACT producer **Rip Claassen** and director **Ellen Dempsey** have assembled a cast that they feel are perfectly suited to the challenge of making *Wanda June* crackle with as much hilarity and insight as Vonnegut's original cast, which included Marsha Mason and Kevin McCarthy.

Starring is TACT stalwart **Bill Aitken**, whose impressive work in productions like *Moby Dick Rehearsed* and *Mister Roberts* make him a natural choice for the Hemingwayesque

Harold. **Kari Ginsburg**, who has already made a strong impression this season as the young love interest in *Ah, Wilderness!* is Penelope, and the other bizarre characters are in the capable hands of some of TACT's most familiar character actors: **Joe Cronin** (LBJ in *MacBird*), **Brian Crane** (the abused producer in *Hellzapoppin*), **Brian Razzino** and **Bill Gordon** (*Cops*), and **Deborah Critzer** (*The Autumn Garden*). Young actors **Andrew Newman**, **Aiden Walker** and **Rachel Webber** (as Wanda June) complete the cast.

Trena Null, who won deserved praise for her set in *Cops*, will handle set and props design duties in *Happy Birthday, Wanda June*. **Anne Marie Castringo**, who has designed many TACT shows including *Cops*, will handle the lighting, and **Rip Claassen** is the costume designer. **Maggie Clifton** will stage manage.

The American Century Theater performs at Theatre II, Gunston Arts Center, 2700 S. Lang Street, Arlington, Virginia 22206. Performances are Thursday through Saturday evenings at 8 pm, with Saturday or Sunday matinees at 2:30 PM. More information is available at www.americancentury.org.

The American Century Theater is a 501(c)(3) professional nonprofit theater company dedicated to producing, great, important, and neglected 20th Century American playwrights. TACT is funded in part by the Arlington County Cultural Affairs Division of the Department of Parks, Recreation and Community Services, the Virginia Commission for the Arts, numerous foundations and many generous donors.

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